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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 002856

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E, CA/VO

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CVIS](#) [ET](#)

SUBJECT: SOMALI REGIONAL PRESIDENT'S VISA DELAY PERCEIVED
AS POLITICAL MESSAGE

REF: ADDIS ABABA 1797

Classified By: CDA Roger A. Meece for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

¶1. (C) An ongoing delay in the issuance of a visa to Somali Regional State President Dawed Mohammed has been interpreted in the region as U.S. condemnation of his alleged participation in human rights abuses. Ethiopia's ethnic Somali population has largely welcomed this action, viewing it as a criticism of Government of Ethiopia (GoE) counter-insurgency measures. Dawed's effectiveness has reportedly been damaged as a result. End summary.

Background

¶2. (SBU) On September 22, 2009, Dawed Mohammed Ali, president of Ethiopia's Somali Regional State, and five of his advisors applied for a non-immigrant visa to travel to the U.S., with the stated purpose of conducting "diplomatic work." At that time, Dawed publicly announced he planned to travel to the U.S. According to media reports and local sources, Dawed planned to meet with members of the Ethiopian diaspora to confront opposition to his Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP, a member of the ruling coalition) and raise funds for the same. Within one day, post's Consular section sent a required Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) (not related to his alleged human rights record) to the Department for processing, and in early October, post provided additional information on Dawed to the Visa Office (CA/VO). Post has remained in close contact with CA/VO, which has closely monitored this case. Dawed's visa application remains pending.

¶3. (C) Dawed assumed his post one year ago, and his many opponents view him as a puppet of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front's (EPRDF) inner circle. Although he is a member of the Somali region's populous Ogaden clan, he was raised outside the region and does not personally have a large political base in the region. Post has received previous reports of a power struggle within the regional government, and limited reports of Dawed's direct involvement in human rights abuses in the region (Ref A). However, Dawed has also been a strong supporter of greater humanitarian access in the Somali region.

Issuance Delay Interpreted as Message from U.S.

¶4. (C) During a November 23-25 visit to the Somali region, several sources told PolOff that the prevailing public

opinion there is that the U.S. refused to grant Dawed a visa because of his involvement in human rights abuses. (Note: Although Dawed's application remains pending, the perception after more than two months is that he has been denied. End note.) In the Somali region, where there has long been a perception that the U.S. supports GoE abuses in the name of combating terrorism, the perceived denial has been viewed extremely favorably. In addition to the sense that justice has been served, this action is also seen as a change in U.S. policy toward the GoE's counter-insurgency actions.

¶5. (C) Abdi Aden (protect), Mercy Corps Program Coordinator and a former USAID advisor, told PolOff that the perception that the U.S. is anti-Dawed has weakened Dawed's authority and limited his effectiveness to the point that he may soon be replaced. (Note: The regional president is chosen by the Regional Council, which is dominated by the EPRDF. End note). Farah Omer Beto (protect), Director of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Somali region, suggested that the level of distrust between Dawed and military commanders in the region had increased of late, with the power balance tilting further away from Dawed.

Comment

¶6. (C) Not considering the merits of Dawed's visa application, his public announcement of a trip to the U.S., combined with his inability to secure a visa for over two months, has damaged his credibility in the region. Both the public and the GoE appear to have interpreted the delay in issuance as U.S. disapproval of Dawed, with the public

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cheering and the GoE reconsidering Dawed's fitness to serve in his position. If Dawed's visa is eventually approved, public opinion of the U.S. among inhabitants of the Somali region (which has been bolstered by the perceived denial) will likely be negatively impacted. In any event, this delay in visa issuance has impacted power dynamics and public opinion in the region.
MEECE